

Advertising feature

Better Vision, Better Performance

Can laser eye surgery help police professionals do their job better?

After laser eye surgery, Tiger Woods, arguably the world's best golfer, effortlessly won the Pebble Beach PGA tournament in February, 2000, in California. "The hole is bigger, the ball is bigger," Woods remarked after his win.

In little more than a year's time, the US Air Force has improved mission readiness with a program designed to eliminate the need for contact lenses and glasses. Since the program began, the Air Force has eliminated the need for, or reduced the dependence on, glasses for more than 4,000 service members.

According to the Air Force Surgeon General's office, the purpose for their laser surgery program is to increase the readiness of warfighters by eliminating the need for glasses or contact lenses. Professor Dan Reinstein, medical director of the London Vision Clinic in the UK, thinks that these types of programs are the future of laser vision correction.

Around 100,000 people a year in the UK are now having laser eye surgery. Those who have had laser treatments include Sir Richard Branson, Nicole Kidman, Courteney Cox, Mel Brown and Nasser Hussain, England's cricket captain. Keen patients include professionals whose vision is key to their work performance. Golfers, sportsmen, pilots, firemen, paramedics, police officers and military personnel are taking advantage of the surgery.

"Corrective lenses can be a hindrance in the field or in the cockpit. We are increasing the readiness aspect of urgency oriented professionals by reducing their dependence on glasses and contact lenses. Right now we see a lot of folks out there in the field who do a variety of things in a day that are impeded by glasses and contact lenses."

Daniel Jelley, a London Police Officer agrees. "I couldn't tolerate contact lenses, and so before my laser eye surgery I had to wear glasses. Now during a foot chase, I can actually chase after people without my glasses bumping up and down on my nose."

"Nearly 100 percent of our patients do not need glasses to see after this procedure," says Reinstein who is also consultant to the Medical Protection Society on developing guidelines to ensure that safety standards are met by UK surgeons.

In a study presented at the Congress of Wavefront Sensing and Aberration-Free Refractive Correction in San Francisco this February 2003, an outstanding 92% of patients, including those with a very high

refractive error, achieved 20/20 (6/6) or better, 97% achieved 20/25 (6/8) or better, and 100% achieved 20/32 or better (20/40 or 6/12 is the driving standard)

In a recent interview with Health Which? Reinstein said: "LASIK is extraordinarily safe in fully trained hands, but even average surgeons can still get it right 90 per cent of the time." He is an expert laser surgeon who spends a lot of time educating people on the marked difference between expert and just experienced surgeons. "Just like in any profession, the few bad apples can give the profession a bad name."

Contrast

Karl Beesley, a former police officer from Winterley has noticed a "stark contrast" between clinics in terms of patient care and service. "Having been a recipient of surgery and care at two facilities I am well positioned to comment on the differences between clinics. During my appointments I have been very impressed by Professor Reinstein's dedication to research in understanding what others just shrug their shoulders at."

According to Health Which? magazine, surgeons like Reinstein are rare in the UK. They found that "Dan Reinstein is one of very few ophthalmologists working in the UK who is a fellowship-trained specialist refractive surgeon." Cambridge educated, he had to leave the UK to pursue specialty training in the field. "Coming back to practice in London has presented quite a few challenges. While the technology is better than in the US, patients don't have access to the same volume of objective information both in the news and through the different clinics."

Objective information is necessary to overcome a strong fear of the unknown which stops many people from going ahead with the life changing surgery. "The media has done a very good job of generating fear through inaccurate and often false information based on anecdotal evidence. If I were to tell someone that the risk of damaging your vision through laser eye treatment is less than the risk of getting in a fatal car accident, most people would consider that a low risk scenario."



Professor Dan Reinstein screening patient for laser eye treatment suitability

To combat the ineffective information available to patients, Professor Reinstein has produced a handout called the UK Guide to Laser Eye Surgery. "Sensational media stories highlighting either extreme positives or extreme negatives do not present the real objective opportunity of laser eye surgery."

Fortunately, Beesley and Jelley dug further than the morning paper to find the truth about laser eye surgery. "As far as the corrective surgery is concerned, I would grade the results as excellent, and I now consider myself to have perfect vision," says Beesley.

Freedom

Jelley is happy with his new freedom at work. "When I do catch up with the suspect, and they resist or fight, I no longer have to worry about my glasses being knocked off or with having to look for them after a fight. I can also see further than before, which makes it easier to pick up license plates and get more accurate descriptions of places and subjects."

The two most common procedures are called PRK (photorefractive keratectomy) and LASIK (laser in situ Keratomileusis). The laser reshapes the cornea by removing microscopic tissue from the surface with an ultraviolet light. The reshaped cornea conforms to the patient's contact lenses or glasses prescription. The beam of light is so precise it can cut notches in a strand of human hair without breaking it. The skill of

the surgeon is paramount in successful LASIK procedures, which are the most popular these days, used by 90 per cent of patients.

The current technology, called Wavefront, makes it possible to achieve 20/20 and even better. Wavefront LASIK takes into account each patient's "eyeprint", which is as unique as a fingerprint, and creates a specialized treatment plan for their LASIK or PRK treatment. Reinstein is firm on the impact this will make for future eye treatments. "This makes the same type of difference in laser eye surgery as that between a bespoke suit and one just off the rack. Bespoke treatments mean better overall fit for the patient, resulting in outstanding visual results."

In terms of UK Police Force policy on the surgery, every department has a different policy. It is slowly becoming acceptable for officers to have the surgery if they require it. Outside of work, officers, including Jelley, have found other benefits. "Off the job, I am playing rugby now and can actually see what's going on, and I'm happy to be able to wear a decent pair of fashionable sunglasses without having to worry about a prescription."

Further information

To get a free copy of Professor Reinstein's UK Guide to Laser Eye Surgery visit www.londonvisionclinic.com or call 0800 587 4705.